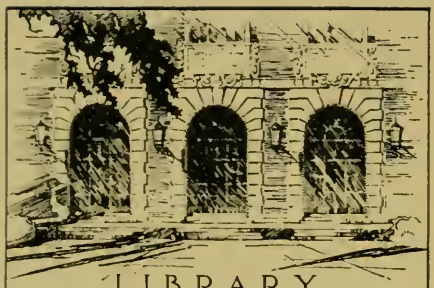

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× A Plea for the Middle Classes by Rev. N. Woodard.

No. 6.]

EXETER-HALL

SERMONS FOR THE WORKING CLASSES.

WHY WILL YE DIE?

A Sermon,

PREACHED JUNE 28TH, 1857.

BY THE VERY REV.

THE DEAN OF CANTERBURY.

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WHY WILL YE DIE?

BY THE

VERY REV. THE DEAN OF CANTERBURY.

"Why will ye die?"—EZEKIEL xviii. 31.

You have heard, my brethren, the circumstances under which God makes this remonstrance to his people, the children of Israel. He pleads with them through the whole of this chapter, and sets forth to them his dealings with them—how that his dealings are just and right, as between man and his Maker—how that there is in them nothing forced, nothing unequal, nothing that we can complain of, but that everything is fair and straightforward; grace is offered, and mercy is offered, and whatsoever soul acquires that grace and mercy shall be safe, and shall live; and whatsoever soul rejects that grace and mercy shall be in peril, and shall die; and that no man shall suffer for another man, and that none shall have anything to complain of; when all stand before the bar of the great Almighty Judge, all that they shall have then to confess is, that their ways were unequal, but that God's were equal.

Now, we—this multitude here assembled—stand in the presence of the same God as then pleaded with Israel. He is the same God, bears the same character, carries on his dealings with the same fairness towards us, as he did towards them. We stand, it is true, on a very different footing, regards his bounty, from that on which they stood; and that I will presently, by his help, lay forth and explain to you in

detail, when I come to press this question home to every individual soul among you.

But now let us deal with the question itself, as it lays itself out for our consideration, simply and plainly in the text of which it consists; for there never was a text in the whole of Scripture that preached its own sermon better than this text which I have read to you.

I. In the first place, then, what is this word with which my text ends; for upon that the whole stress of the matter evidently depends: "Why will ye *die?*"

Now, what does this mean? I dare say that you, my friends, to whomsoever I am speaking, whatever your station in life is, have bent over a bed of death. There are very few of us whom God hath not called in his providence to witness some deathbed scene. You have bent you over the dying, or over the dead; and you have watched that face which used to speak to you with such meaning gathering blankness and darkness; you have seen those eyes which once sparkled upon you with intelligence become glazed, and dead, and fixed; you have seen that form, which but five minutes ago, perhaps agonized and tossing in pain, was covered with the sweat of that agony, drop into lifelessness, and lie before you like a piece of the material of this earth. That is death. We all know what it is; but whose death is that? Who is it that dies, when we thus witness that scene —when the family are gathered around that bed, holding their breath, and watching for the last moment? What are the first words they speak when it is all over—when the blankness and nothingness have succeeded to anxiety? "He is gone!" Those are the words: "He is gone!" Then it was not *he* that died! It was something belonging to him which underwent a change; but it was not the man that died. That affected the body; but it did not affect the person. We do not say that when a brute dies beneath our eyes; we do not attribute to a brute that sort of doubleness —that *he* should be in one place, and the carcase in another; and, therefore, when this text says, "Why will *ye* die?" it does not allude to the death of the body—it does not allude to that of which I have just been speaking; but I have been speaking of that that I might take it for an example—that I might take it for a guide to that more mysterious and less well-known thing to which the text does allude.

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We have already spoken of this person, this personality, this *he*, this *I*, this *you*, which does not die upon the bed of death, which is not crushed by the power of the accident, which remains and exists on. Now what is this? Bestow, I beseech you, your thoughts upon me for a moment, and go with me through that which I am about to say. I know that I am speaking to many who are in the habit of thinking —to many who are in the habit of thinking deeply, and thinking upon difficult things, for I know that the class which I see before me—and bless God that I see before me!—are men in the habit of thinking, and men in the habit of pondering over these things which I am now about to speak of. Now this *I*, and this *you*, about whom we are questioning, is, I have said, a something which we do not apply to the brute. We never consider the brute creature, the poor dumb animal as we express it, responsible; we do not consider that he, or it, rather, can give an account; we do not consider, in any proper sense of the word, that it can do right, or can do wrong. It may do that which is inconvenient to us; it may put forth its strength in a way that we do not desire, and that puts us in peril, and we use concerning it, in a certain kind of improper sense, the words right and wrong, the words obedient and disobedient; but we use them with regard only to our own purposes, and not to any responsibility belonging to the brute animal. But the moment you get to a human body, whether that human body is man, woman, or child, if that human body is only in possession of reason and of sense, you cannot divest yourself of that idea of responsibility. That body is answerable, and that thing which that body does is right or is wrong; and I defy any man, I defy any philosopher, however much he may reason and write about it, to divest himself of this idea. He does right or he does wrong. If he does right—I am not saying now whether he is right or wrong in this which follows, but—there is a certain sort of self-congratulation follows upon it, and he knows he has done right. If he does wrong, supposing him to be an ordinary man, and not absolutely blinded by the power of habitual sin—if he does wrong in the common and broad acceptation of the word, his conscience in some measure accuses him.

II. Now, this may lead us to know and to feel, as indeed all mankind of sound mind have known and have felt, that this personality of which we speak is a lasting and enduring

thing, which shall give an account. You cannot deny it. There may be persons in this hall at this moment who flatter themselves that they do not believe this; but they do believe it. I would call to witness not what they choose to say and what they choose to profess—not what they boast with their boon companions—but I would call to witness their solitary nights; I would call to witness their hours of sickness; I would call to witness that terror which drives them perhaps to the public-house, or to profane company to get rid of such thoughts. They do believe their responsibility; and responsibility of any kind, whenever believed in, is a pledge of immortality that you cannot get rid of. The one follows upon the other as closely as motion follows upon life. Whatever is responsible is immortal. There must be one to whom that responsibility must be exercised; and we cannot—I defy you to do it—we cannot conceive of God, that he should create a being accountable to him, with this feeling of accountableness, with this consciousness of responsibility, to extinguish that being and put an end to that life. I say it is inconceivable. We cannot imagine a good and a gracious God calling into existence a being with hopes, and fears, and responsibilities, and terrors, and anticipations of this final account, and then putting an end to that being. He calls him into being, so that he may live, that he may go on and serve him, and enter, through a state of probation and trial, into a state of perfection and of glory.

And now we have come, I believe, very near the point. You will say to me, perhaps, "How then can this being whom you are speaking of to us, this personality, this immortal, responsible soul—for such is the word which we commonly use with regard to this personality—how can it die? Well, then, let us go back, if you please, to this bed of death, of which we spoke just now. Let us carry onward that scene a little further. Perhaps you may be disposed to say to me, "You cannot carry it on much further without offending our taste." You must excuse me. I did not come hither to consult your taste, but I came hither to wrestle with you for an hour on God's behalf; and if in that wrestle I am obliged to give you some rough falls, blame not, I beseech you, the taste of the matter; question not nor criticise anything so far beneath our present mark; but ask yourselves what is said, and whether what is pleaded is calculated to reach your minds

and to influence your hearts. Well, then, let us follow on that scene a little. Let us pass—it is a remarkable sentence of the greatest of English preachers—"from the freshness and the fulness of the cheeks of childhood to the horror and loathsomeness of a three days' burial." And what do we see there? The body is broken up; it is become a seething mass of foul and degraded and loathsome life—a life not its own—a life which did not belong to its beautiful and harmonious construction. Its parts are gone, or are going, each to their way; the solid to the dust of the earth, the liquid to the mighty ocean. It is dispersed; it is passed away. I know that God shall build that body up again. This is a point, and a glorious point it is, of our Christian belief; and I mention it for fear you should imagine that by not mentioning it I was forgetting. But it does not belong to my present subject: I am only now concerned with the phenomena of that death which is to guide me to the phenomena of the other death about which I am pleading with you to-night. That body is dispersed; its harmony is destroyed; its beauty is marred; it is gone into corruption and decay. "It is sown a corruptible body." It is sown in shame and in contempt. Though it was, perhaps, the dearest of things on earth to us a few days ago, we have put it out of our way; we have buried our dead out of our sight. And that is the death of the body.

Now is there not something very analogous to that—I mean very like it, something which follows the same rules—in the death of man's immortal spirit? What do you suppose God has intended your immortal spirit to be? Take a pattern from the body. Can anything be more beautiful, more harmonious, more adapted to its end, than this frame of yours and mine? If it were seen for the first time it would be the greatest wonder that had ever been obtained in the universe. We see it every day, and therefore we regard it not. Why, there are books written full of instruction, full of curious and remarkable facts, and the wonderful ways of God, on the human hand, on the human eye, on the most apparently trivial parts of this body of ours; and every one of them surpasses our intelligence and excites our wonder and our gratitude and praise. And do you suppose that God intended the spirit to be less harmonious than the body, less wonderful in its operations, less beautiful in its structure, less grand in that which it was to do and to accomplish? We cannot imagine

it for one moment. The spirit was intended by its Maker to rise up from one degree to another of contemplation of him and of service of him, and of likeness to him—all in beautiful harmony—the affections drawing out the desires, the desires guiding the resolutions, the resolutions influencing the practice, the practice carrying onwards the situation and condition, all in the most lovely harmony. Now that is the life of the spirit; and we shall have to come back to that a little, and to build it up out of death by-and-by.

But what is the death of the spirit? Can you not easily conceive it? Is it not obvious to the very simplest of our thoughts, that the spirit of man may and, alas! does fall into disharmony with all these its powers, just like the beautiful organs of the body may fall out with one another; that the spirit may present, in its way and in its condition, something like the terrible and loathsome scene which we just now witnessed with regard to the body after death? But then, notice all this remarkable difference. The body, as I have said, falls asunder: God shall build it up again. For the present it perishes; but there can be no cessation, there can be no syncope in the life of the spirit; the spirit must live on, in the midst of this death—must exist on, perhaps I should rather say, and for this night keep the word "living," and the word "life," to their glorious and more proper meaning. The spirit exists on, then, divided against itself; miserable, and in discord; all its powers wasted, all its energies spent in self-remorse. It passes in this condition out of a state of trial into a state of finality; and in this state of finality, what can we conceive but that which is known in Scripture by the name of eternal death; self-accusations for evermore; the ages of eternity rolling on—if we may use such an imperfect expression—one after another, thousands after thousands, millenniums after millenniums; and the spirit still remaining in this state of death, broken up, miserable, having lost its centre, namely, God; having lost its object, namely, God; having lost all its foundation of joy and of blessing, and existing in eternal death?

III. Now comes another most important point to our present consideration, and it is this—How came about this death? You see I have now dealt with these few words, "Why will ye die?" I have tried to show you, however imperfectly, what is the broad and literal meaning of the death of the

person himself; that is, the breaking up of the spirit for want of God; its existing in misery to all eternity for want of him who is the source of all blessing and joy; but now I ask—and it is important, as leading to the next word as we go backward in our text—"Why will ye die?"—How came this about? What has it to do with man's will?

Now, these at first sight are very difficult questions, and they are questions with which it would have been utterly impossible for us to deal, had not the Holy Spirit been given to us to enable us to deal with them. The man of the world, the unbeliever, cannot deal with these points. He meets with death in the world; he meets with the death of the body, and he meets with the death of the spirit, in the sense I have been explaining—misery, division against self, ruin; and he regards it all as the natural and the inevitable state of things. He regards this as a world of disappointment, a world of blind chance, and he tosses and drifts about it as he best may; and he has no solution whatever of this of which we are about to speak. But we, thank God, have a solution; the Holy Spirit has given us a solution; and it is not only the solution sufficient for it, but it is the only one that has ever been attempted to be given; it is the only one existent upon earth, besides being the only sufficient one, and the one which will carry us through the matter; and it is this—"God created man upright." He created him to follow out the intention of his spirit, gifted with judgment and the body; of both of which we have been now speaking. But God did not bind him to his liberty in this way, and to his joy, and to his ultimate end, of reaching after and getting to glory hereafter. He left him free; and this is one of the greatest dignities with which our nature was gifted of God—that it was not made like any tribe of the brute creation, always to run in the same channel, to be incapable of advance or improvement; but it was made free to stand and free to fall. What lay before it was an object of adoration, reverence, and obedience; and with temptation before it, and God's grace ready to help, man was then put into a state of trial, and man fell. That fall was of course foreseen—and I state this to meet an objection, because I am speaking now in the presence of plenty that are ready to make objections, and I am very glad I am so speaking, because these objections ought to be met. It was no accident; man did not fall without God fore-

seeing it and permitting it. It was God's gracious intention to bring out of that fall glory, not only to himself, but to all his creatures in himself—salvation to all his creatures who would seek after him, and would come up to and accept the way of salvation, of which we are about in the sequel to speak to you, I hope, more at large.

Well, that fall took place. But what have you and I to do with that? I thought we read here that the son should not be responsible for the sin of the father. No more the son is. But this is a very different case. It was not a case of responsibility merely; because there, as we have just said, very properly, and as this chapter justly and beautifully lays forth, we stand each one of us alone; but it was just a matter of common, natural evolution, a descent of the race from the head of the race, of a tree from the seed at the first opening, and from the bud and parent stock. That stock by disobedience became defiled; we who follow inherit that defilement; we inherit it not to our ruin, if we are wise, but we inherit it so that we are brought under a system in which, "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound," about which also I hope we shall say to you more by-and-by. But we are now dealing with the question of how death comes about.

Death came into the world by sin. What would have become of this body, which was made at first "of the earth, earthy," as the Apostle tells us,—("The first man was of the earth, earthy,")—we cannot tell. It might have passed through some glorious change, before it was admitted into the kingdom of God in heaven; but of that we can say nothing. All we do know is this, that death, in all its horrors, is accompanied by pain, and by decay, and decomposition, and all that loathsomeness of which we have spoken, as entirely the consequence of sin —the death of the body, and the death of the soul likewise. Sin shifted the centre of man's soul. Before, he could have gone on revolving round that centre in beautiful obedience; after sin, he has become, in the technical sense of the word, eccentric. He now revolves no longer round God, his proper centre, but he has sought an orbit of his own, and this leads him into disarrangement and disagreement, and all those things of which we have been speaking, as ending and issuing in the death of the soul.

Well, then, you will say to me, if this is the case, what

has the will of God to do with it? How can this be said to us, and how can God plead with us in the text, "Why *will* ye die?" If death came into the world by sin, if the death of the body is the result of sin—a result which neither you, nor I, nor any one can avoid—how can it be said of the death of the soul, "Why *will* ye die?" Is not that a necessary result of sin too?

Now we are come to the point, you see, of these words having been necessarily spoken, and the whole of this chapter necessarily written to a people in covenant with God. God has provided a way out of this death. It has pleased him not to provide any way out of natural, corporeal, bodily death. "If Christ be in you," says the Apostle, "the body is dead because of sin, but the spirit is life, because of righteousness." There is just the distinction. God has bound upon us all death according to the flesh; but he has not bound upon us all death according to the spirit, although it is our own state by nature out of which we must be helped, if we are to get out of it at all, and that help he has graciously given us. Now, I have said he wrote this chapter to a people in covenant with him. It is all, you see, "House of Israel." "Why will ye die, O house of Israel?" "Yet, saith the house of Israel, the Lord's ways are unequal." This "House of Israel" was a peculiar people, taken out from among the nations. God gave them his promises; he gave them his ordinance of circumcision; he gave them his covenant, his law, and his ordinances; and they walked before him in the light of that his great salvation, manifested to them in the prospect of a Redeemer to come. It is on that ground that he makes all his pleadings with them in this chapter. You do not suppose that a word here spoken about "he that is righteous," and the righteousness that he does, and his living in that righteousness, can possibly apply to natural, unaided man, who has fallen from God. No, it applies to men under grace, to men under the prospect of a Saviour, to those who had made a covenant with God by sacrifice, "ordered in all things and sure," and in the power and strength of that covenant were able to do these things pleasing to God, able to stand before him in his faith and fear, and to say, as the greatest of them said, the sweet Psalmist of Israel, "I will go forth in the strength of the Lord God, and will make mention of thy righteousness only,"

and able to have those glorious hopes which he expressed in the words "When I awake after thy likeness I shall be satisfied." And it is on those same grounds that we, standing as we do upon the foundation on which Israel stood, but with a far more glorious inheritance, and far more precious promises, read this chapter to you to-night, and enter into every word of it, in our Christian sense, as we make the whole of this precious Old Testament our own in a Christian sense. "Why will ye die?" are the pleadings not merely of God the Creator, but of God the Redeemer and of God the Sanctifier. I could not speak those words to you to-night, if you were not admitted by the grace of God, in the revelation of himself in his Son, to the possibility of a hope of restoration from death unto life. It would be mere mockery, if Christ had never been sent into the world to save sinners; if the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world had never been devised in the Almighty counsels—it would be mere making mockery of God to come to the world and to say, "Why will ye die?" But when he says, "Why will ye die, O house of Israel?" and when I say, "Why will ye die, O people of England?" there is a meaning in these words, because we take for granted, and we presuppose God's precious covenant of life in Christ Jesus. We come to you not as outcasts from God; we come to you not as without God in the world, however much some of you, alas! may be living without God in the world; but we come to you on the strength of that covenant which God has sealed and ratified in the death of his Son upon the cross, which he now assures to us by the pleading of his Son in heaven; and on the strength of that covenant we say, "Why will ye die?" And how can we say that on the strength of that covenant? Because in that covenant, and by means of that covenant, the dead will of man is empowered to raise itself up, and to draw near to God; because there is grace offered to the dead in that covenant. "The hour is coming," said our blessed Lord, speaking those words spiritually, "the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they which hear shall live." "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead," is the voice of the covenant, "and Christ shall give thee light."

Now, I know that it will be said to me—and I am fully prepared upon that ground to speak further—that Christ has

himself appointed an ordinance of admission into the outward profession of the covenant; and it will be asked of me, perhaps, Am I justified in thus boldly casting assertion of the cost over a multitude of whom I know not whether there be not many among them—hundreds among them—who have never been admitted by that ordinance? I say I am justified. That ordinance binds closer to him, closer in responsibility, all those who have been thus admitted into the outward professing congregation of the people of the Lord; but the mercies of the Lord are over all the land where those mercies are proclaimed; and it does not depend upon the fact whether a man whom I address is a baptized man, whether I may speak of him as being under the covenant of God in Christ, because I know and I see that in the scriptures of God themselves the Gospel was preached to persons, and the Holy Spirit descended on persons, and thereby received them into the true and living church, before that ordinance was administered, although it was administered afterwards. I say, then, to every one here present, God has made a covenant with you in him: and on the strength of that covenant it is that I say to you, "Why *will* ye die?"

But you may say to me, perhaps, "All this has been mere assertion: you have yet to prove that we are thus disposed for death: you have yet to show us that we *will* die in this sense." "I do not want," any man here may say, "I do not want this death of the spirit of which you have spoken. The very last thing I desire is unhappiness. I do not want to be divided against myself; I want to live a calm, and peaceable, and honest life, to go down to my grave respected and honoured; and I do not know what you mean by saying that I am bent upon this death of the spirit: your words are cast away upon me, and are useless." Nay, my friend, let me say a little more to you. We have told you that this death of the spirit is the result of man forgetting God, and that your natural state—as your natural dispositions are concerned, as your common, ordinary, uninfluenced life is concerned—is to go on in this forgetfulness of God, and to pass under the shadow of this death of the spirit, till the shadow gathers into darkness, and the darkness into blackness, and the spirit passes into that place of death from which there is no recall. The will to die, in those who have heard the gospel of Christ, and who have been brought under this covenant, and here

have it proclaimed to them, is the disposition to remain in this world without God. And what is it to remain without God? You may say, "I do not know that I break any of God's outward commandments. You tell me to honour my father and mother; you tell me not to commit murder, not to commit adultery, not to steal, not to bear false witness, not to covet. I am not aware that I break any of these commandments; my life is a respectable one." Yes; but this is not the matter. Is your life led as in the sight of God? Are you conscious, when you look inward upon your own moral state, of a sun shining down upon that moral state, and that sun the presence of God,—known, recognised in your habits? And what is the presence of God? It is not the presence of a God of your own imagination; it is not the presence of some Supreme Being whom your reason has built up for itself. It is very proper that you should reason, in aid of that revelation which God has given you; but it is not some Supreme Being whom your reason has built up for itself out of the phenomena of nature about you, and of whom you will not believe anything but what you have thus gathered for yourself. That is not the God of whom I am speaking. God has revealed himself; and he has revealed himself as manifested in the person of his blessed Son: and if your life is led as in the sight of God, it must be as in the sight of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has wrought out for us salvation in Christ, and who pleads with you—"Why will ye die?"—that you may have life in Christ, which is the only life of the spirit, because "he that hath the Son of God hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."

And now do not go and say,—After a bit he drifted away into great and high doctrines that we did not understand, and began to talk about theology, and began to speak as they speak from pulpits where we cannot listen, and where our minds and our interest drop within us. The matter of which I speak is exceedingly simple; every man here can understand it. Christ died that we might live; he lives that we might live for ever. He has become the head of our nature; he has become to us the source of grace and of help, the help of the Holy Spirit of God, to overcome our evil dispositions, to help us to regulate our tempers, to glorify and adorn him in our station in life, to be better men, better fathers, better husbands, better brothers and sisters, better citizens, better in

everything than we ever were before. And this is a matter of every day life: it is a matter in which there are high things which neither you nor I can understand, and in which there are many things which require explanation; and the explanation perhaps is best given by the ministers of God, who have made it their study to give it. God may reveal it to any man by his Spirit; but it follows, as an ordinary matter of course, that those who have given the most attention to it, and lived most in the study of it, should be able to tell the most of it. And so far will the matter come to be one of simple common sense; and I am speaking to you the words of common sense and soberness, when I say that if God has revealed himself to you in Jesus Christ, your bounden duty in this matter, and your only way of escape from the death of the spirit, is to receive God as revealed in Jesus Christ, to study the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to receive the salvation of Jesus Christ, to live upon the righteousness of Jesus Christ, to seek for the spirit of Jesus Christ; to become men of prayer, men of faith, seeking the ordinances of grace, valuing the word of God. All this is but the ordinary verdict of our stern English common sense, looking at the Bible, and gathering its conclusions from the Bible.

Here, then, is the meaning of this question,—"Why will ye die?" that God has manifested to us life, glorious life in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now let me say a little more about this, before we conclude. As we asked, what is the death of the spirit? so now let us ask what is the life of the spirit? You heard something of it just now. I spoke of the spirit as meant by its Creator to go on in glorious harmony with itself and with him, and to advance from stage to stage of the knowledge of him and of his works and ways. Now apply and carry on this. Wherever you live in this world, and about whatever you are employed in this world, there is a life put in the power of the spirit of this kind; there is no situation in life that excludes from it. There is no man here present that can say, "He asked me 'Why will ye die?' and told me about a certain life that I now might live in my spirit, but my situation precludes my living to life, and I am obliged to go my way, and give up the matter in despair; and what he said does not apply to me." There is no one can say this —not one. You may be in the very humblest situation; there

is this life in Christ Jesus for you. You may believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and take him as your Saviour, and take him as your Master, and make him to be the object of your desires, the Lord of your spirit, the great pattern of your imitation, the righteousness wherewith ye are clothed. Now, what is there in all this that the meanest, and the humblest, and the busiest, and the most obscure, may not take upon themselves, just as much as the highest. and the one who has most leisure and most understanding? Is there anything in it difficult to understand? I see nothing difficult. The little child who loves its Saviour is just as good a Christian as the philosopher who loves his Saviour; Christ said, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven;" and every one of you, some perhaps of whom may be at this moment thinking, as I am speaking, that it is a difficult matter that is before you, must divest yourself of all high thoughts, and become simple as a little child—simple, even till the heart throbs, and the cheek glows, and the tear bursts forth at the recital of God's mercies. You must take from you and put away all the fashion, and the manner, and the etiquette of this world in such a matter as this, and you must become simple like a little child; and every one can becom e such as this. We are told that "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin;" certainly, one touch of nature makes all the world God's kin. God's word is as simple to you, as open to you, as to every other.

As, then, this life of the spirit is a thing I may speak of to each one, wherein does it consist in the case of each one?

You must seek it, in fact, in your ordinary occupations. There is the first thing. God will be found of each one of us in the path of life that he marks out for us. He gives us, it is most true, and blessed be his name for it!—he gives us such days as this, when we can assemble together to hear of these things; but he does not give us the invitation to come, and draw near, and live, on this day only. He gives us, again, times of sorrow, times of solemn thought, times of bereave ment; and I believe that when we get to the other side of the water, and look back upon the map of our present course, we shall see that these were our green places, and these were our still waters of comfort, and these were our recallings to him. But these are not the only times when he calls us. Every day, and all day long, he is calling us.

The mechanic who lifts his arm to do his ordinary work—in every lifting of that arm is God pleading, "Why wilt thou die?" The man who goes forth to his daily labour by the light of his glorious sun—every beam that is shed upon him pleads with him, "Why wilt thou die?" The man who lies down to sleep at night, wherever he be—his preservation in those hours of slumber—the sweet rest that he obtains—is but another pleading with him, "Why wilt thou die?" And so we might go on through all the common pathways of ordinary life, grimed as they are with labour, looked down upon as mean, and considered by some as having nothing to do with this matter, and we might show you that they are all means of grace. God meets with you in every one of them, and in them you must seek life in your spirits.

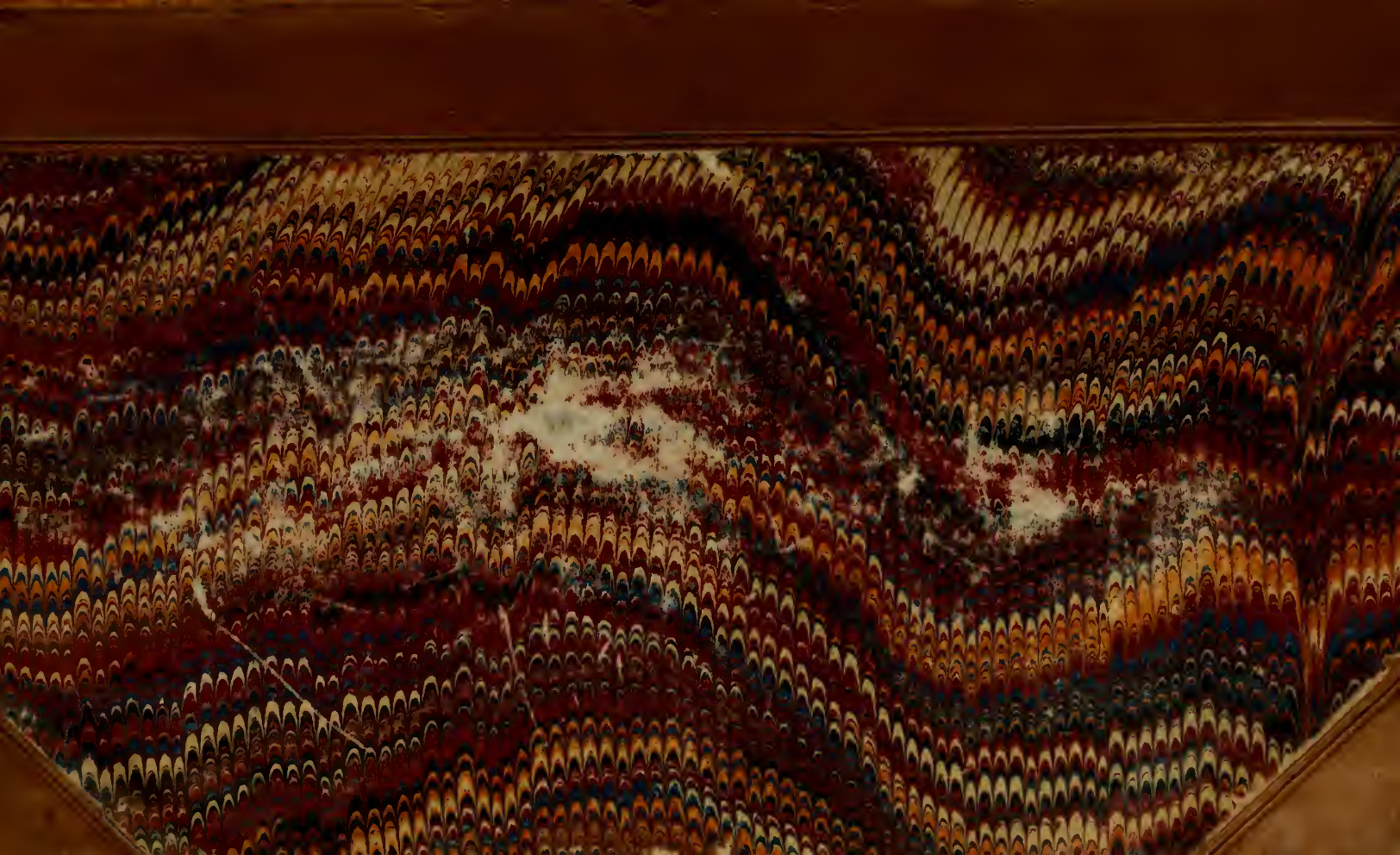
Now, it needs very little reminding of mine to go on with such considerations as these, and to say that this life of your spirits consists, in the very first place, in the continual recognition of God by you. The one difference between man and man is this. It is not rank, it is not station, it is not outward advantage, it is not intellect, but it is this—that one man regards a God above him, and another man does not regard a God above him. These are the two great classes into which mankind is split; and regarding a God above him, you know, brings in its train something else that we have said, that he must regard a God as he has revealed himself. But the great distinction is this, that one man regards God in his ways; another does not. Now the life of the spirit depends upon this circumstance; God must be the centre of your spirits if they are to live, just as much as the sun must be the centre of this system, if it is to go on in harmony. God must be the centre round whom your spirits are to revolve in the ordinary orbit of life. You must look at his will; that will must be a guide to you. You must look at his word; that word must be a lamp to your feet, and a light to your paths.

Now every man's conscience here present knows whether he does this or not; and if he does not this, then "Why *will* ye die?" For you are dying; you are not going on in the life of the spirit. God is not yours; his blessed Son is not yours; his Spirit is not yours; and you have no life. That life must begin with the fear of the Lord.

And now I trust every one of you here present, my brethren, from wherever you may have come, however little you may be disposed to throw yourselves heart and life into what you have heard to-night, will weigh this fact with all its solemn considerations. Go home to your houses and talk it over with your families, and inquire, Are we fearing God? for that is the one point. "He said a great deal to us to-night, a great deal" (I dare say) "that we cannot remember, that we may possibly allow to pass out of our minds; but he said that one thing, and that one thing I will ask of my wife, and ask of my children, and we will go forth and ask our brothers and friends, 'Do we fear God?'" for that is the beginning of the life of the spirit. And then if you do, the mind will be all anxious to inquire, What is God? to inquire what it is that we can know about him, how much we can know of his will. And then the life of the spirit goes on, you see, in the knowledge of the Lord. The death of the spirit is a death of ignorance, a putting God from it, a not regarding God in its ways; the life of the spirit is a life of progress, of knowledge of God, of study of his word, if possible; if that cannot be, of going to those places where that word can be heard, and there hearing of it and studying it, and advancing in the faith and fear of God, in practical life, and in the belief of the inward man, from grace to grace, and from strength to strength, transformed by the glorious Spirit of God, who is the great gift of God to those who are living by faith in his Son, even from grace to grace, and from glory to glory, till the spirit enters upon the inheritance of its perfect life, in the presence of God above, when death has passed away, and there is no more mention of decay, nor of the breaking up of body or spirit.

IV. Now, then, God comes to you, my brethren, with this pleading; and he says to every one of you, "*Why* will ye die?" Is there any reason? Can any one here present render me the slightest reason why he should go on in this way of forgetting God and of following after death. What a sight it would be, brethren, suppose all the desires and issues of our common bodily life were reversed, and men, instead of seeking life, sought death? Suppose all God's gracious provisions were exerted to keep men from rushing upon death in the body; what a strange world this would be! But such is the world of the spirit. God is ever, at every turn of your life, putting

in his gracious hand, and plucking you out of the burning; striving to rescue you from the consequences of your own will and your own perverse way. "*Why* will ye die?" There is no reason. There is everything against such a supposition. Life is put before you. I have set before you this day life and death, blessing and cursing. I have told you of One who puts life in your power, of One who died that you might live, of One upon whom, when you believe, that burden of sin which rests upon the guilty conscience of unrenewed man shall roll off and pass away, of One who was slain for you as your passover lamb; so that just as the children of Israel sprinkled the blood upon their lintels and side-posts, so may you sprinkle the blood of his atonement upon your souls, and may stand free in the sight of God, living on, and rejoicing on, with nothing that can be against you, because God is for you,—with the hours of life, chequered indeed as they must be with gloom settling upon them here and there, but still all cheered and comforted by the reconciled presence, and ending in glory unspeakable.

Choose ye, then, this day, my brethren. Go not hence to remark and to criticise upon what you have heard. What you have heard has been said in the simplicity of one who desires that some of those who now sit before him here may stand with him, if it be God's will that it should be so, at the great day, when we all—and we never shall till that day—when we all shall meet again. That has been my desire to-night; and whatever has been said, if it offended against taste, I care but little; if it was not that which would have been said with minute preparation and setting down upon paper, I care nothing. If it has pleaded with your souls for God, and rescued one soul by his grace from eternal death, praise and thanks be to him; and I shall have been pleased thus to have interfered with your course onwards towards death, and to have put in force, with the help of his grace, his own invitation conveyed in the end of this chapter, "I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord; wherefore turn yourselves," turn from sin, from corruption, from dissipation, from forgetfulness, "and live ye." If this has been realised, I say, in any soul—and I would fain hope and pray that it may be in many, and that God will pour out his rich blessing upon every one of these services, and

upon every one which shall in after times, and in other places (for so, I believe, it will be) succeed upon this great experiment — if it has been so to-night, and shall be so then, glory be to him for it, and praise to "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world!"